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C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAMA 000005

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SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS GROUP MAKES FIRST EVER PRISON VISIT  
IN BAHRAIN

Classified By: DCM Susan L. Ziadeh for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary: A delegation from Bahrain Human Rights Society (BHRS), including Deputy Secretary General Dr. Abdulla Al-Derazi, has made a visit to Jaw Prison for men, representing the first time in Bahrain's history that a human rights organization has been allowed access to the prison system. Agreement on access to the prison came after more than two years of requests and then months of discussions between BHRS and the Ministry of Interior (MOI). The Ministry has granted BHRS unlimited access to the prison facilities, administrative staff and prisoners, during a series of visits BHRS will conduct. BHRS expects to release their final report on the delegation's visits in two month's time. End summary.

2. (C) BHRS Deputy Secretary General Dr. Al-Derazi told Poloff December 27 that a team of 15 members of BHRS, including medical doctors, psychiatrists, lawyers and academics, made the first ever visit to Jaw Prison by a human rights organization on December 24. The team made a second visit December 31. Dr. Al-Derazi described over two years of requests to the MOI for access to Bahrain's Jaw Prison for men. BHRS began sending letters to the Ministry in 2003 requesting meetings with some of Jaw Prison's over 450 prisoners but received no response to its requests. BHRS featured these unanswered requests in its annual human rights report. In mid-2005 the Ministry communicated to BHRS a willingness to discuss the matter, and after several meetings, the two sides agreed to parameters for the visits. Per the agreement, Dr. Al-Derazi could not discuss details of the visit, including prison conditions and allegations of mistreatment, until BHRS releases its final report on the visits. He did say, however, that BHRS will not white-wash any of its findings. BHRS anticipates a late February or early March 2006 report release date.

3. (C) Dr. Al-Derazi said that the MOI placed no conditions on the delegation's visit. Prison officials permitted BHRS members to meet with any of the prisoners they desired, including the two prisoners on death row. In addition to the BHRS delegation providing a list of specific individuals with whom they wanted to speak, prison officials gave BHRS a list of all inmates from which the delegation chose names at random. According to Dr. Al-Derazi, no prisoners were off-limits. BHRS members met privately with approximately 30 inmates on their first visit and another 40 on their second, all out of hearing range of prison guards, so that prisoners could talk freely. Over the course of several weeks, BHRS will conduct a series of visits including unannounced visits. After completing its review of Jaw prison, BHRS will request access to both the women's prison and to the juvenile detention center.

4. (C) Poloff December 28 contacted Graeme Dunkley, Australian pastor of Awali Community Church (non-denominational), who also visited Jaw Prison December 24, separately from the BHRS visit. As a Christian pastor, Dunkley's intent was to meet a group of 15 Christian prisoners for Christmas. Jaw Prison has four cell blocks; sentence length determines to which block an inmate is assigned. The prison warden is a police colonel whom Dunkley described as very accommodating and welcoming. The warden permitted Dunkley to bring in any kind of Christian literature, clothing and toiletries for the inmates. Dunkley also said that the warden welcomed contributions of religious literature to any of the four libraries housed in each of the prison's cell blocks.

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